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**NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC AND PARTNERS LAUNCH
GEOTOURISM PROGRAM IN GREATER YELLOWSTONE REGION
*Super-Sized MapGuide to Highlight Natural Attributes, Cultural Heritage***

WASHINGTON (April 15, 2008)—National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations has joined with partners in Wyoming, Montana and Idaho in a project to celebrate and help sustain the world-class natural and cultural heritage of the Greater Yellowstone region. A community-based process will create a National Geographic "Geotourism MapGuide" for the region centered on Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks, and including communities and private and public lands in the three partner states.

Working closely with National Geographic on the comprehensive project are Wyoming Travel & Tourism, Idaho Division of Tourism Development, and Travel Montana and its partners, the Yellowstone Country tourism region and the Bozeman, Big Sky and West Yellowstone convention and visitor bureaus. Project coordination is provided by Greater Yellowstone Coalition and Yellowstone Business Partnership.

Local residents and visitors are invited to nominate for inclusion in the MapGuide landmarks, attractions, activities, events and local businesses that define the region's unique character and distinctive appeal. Nominations may be made between April 15 and June 30, 2008, at www.yellowstonegeotourism.net. A regional advisory committee called the Greater Yellowstone Stewardship Council will assist in creating the MapGuide. The Council will represent diverse perspectives, including community leadership, historic preservation, natural resources, public lands management, indigenous peoples, traditional and local arts, agriculture, tourism promotion and local businesses.

Public forums and presentations are being scheduled in communities around the region to encourage nominations and community involvement. Project coordinator Brian Sybert of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition believes participation by local residents is critical to the project's success. "No one knows better what is truly distinctive and noteworthy about this region than the people who live and recreate and conduct business here," he said.

A 2002 study by National Geographic Traveler magazine and the Travel Industry Association of America found that more than 55 million adults in the United States can be described as "geotourists," traveling to enjoy the distinctive character of places and willing to help sustain and enhance those qualities for future visitors. These travelers control more than half the household income of all U.S. travelers.

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Jonathan Tourtellot, director of the National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations, says Greater Yellowstone has great appeal for this discerning tourist market. "This area has maintained its distinctive character, while many other places have not," he said. "We'd like to help local communities and visitors sustain and enhance these values well into the future."

While the MapGuide will provide useful information for travelers, Diane Shober, director of Wyoming Travel & Tourism, explains it is not intended only for visitors. "The MapGuide and the process of creating it will also help local residents delve more deeply into Greater Yellowstone's heritage. This is very much a community effort, and National Geographic will be looking for suggestions from local writers and experts to help explore themes that are important to protecting what we have here."

Janice Brown, executive director of the Yellowstone Business Partnership, says the MapGuide project will lay the groundwork for future collaborations among business, community and conservation interests: "We want to take care of our region's unique natural resources, work for a prosperous yet sustainable economy and help our communities preserve a quality of life that will keep Greater Yellowstone our home of choice."

The National Geographic Society has worked with community-based alliances to develop similar "Geotourism MapGuides" in regions around the world. MapGuides recently were completed in the following areas: the Crown of the Continent (Alberta, British Columbia, Montana), Sonoran Desert (Arizona, Sonora), Vermont and Appalachia. Travel Montana's Victor Bjornberg noted that Montana was a partner in the Crown of the Continent project. He said, "The concept of geotourism and its focus on celebrating and working to protect what is so special about the Crown of the Continent region around Glacier and Waterton parks really appealed to many residents. National Geographic was a great partner, and its internationally recognized stature helped further the region's discussion and actions on this forward-looking approach to tourism and economic development."

The National Geographic Society Center for Sustainable Destinations is providing overall project direction under Jonathan Tourtellot and James Dion; National Geographic Maps, led by Allen Carroll, will handle cartography. Greater Yellowstone Coalition is coordinating public involvement in Montana and Wyoming. Yellowstone Business Partnership will facilitate nominations and public involvement for communities in Idaho.

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Significant funding and regional leadership are being provided by Wyoming Travel & Tourism, the Idaho Division of Tourism Development and the Montana Department of Commerce (Travel Montana). Partners also include the Yellowstone Country tourism region and the Bozeman, Big Sky and West Yellowstone convention and visitor bureaus in Montana, and the Sonoran Institute. The U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service are contributing funding for the community-involvement process.

The National Geographic Society is one of the world's largest nonprofit scientific and educational organizations. Founded in 1888 to "increase and diffuse geographic knowledge," the Society works to inspire people to care about the planet. It reaches more than 300 million people worldwide each month through its official journal, National Geographic, and other magazines; National Geographic Channel; television documentaries; music; radio; films; books; DVDs; maps; school publishing programs; interactive media; and merchandise. National Geographic has funded more than 8,800 scientific research, conservation and exploration projects and supports an education program combating geographic illiteracy. For more information, visit nationalgeographic.com.

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